



March 3, 2010

For more information
Roger Munns (515) 281-4848

After Two-Year Drop, Child Abuse Up in Iowa

DES MOINES, Iowa – A sharp two-year downward trend in child abuse ended last year as Iowa Department of Human Services assessors recorded 11 percent increases in both investigations and findings of abuse or neglect.

DHS Director Charles Krogmeier said any number of factors can influence the trend in abuse findings, such as heightened awareness due to high profile cases, but he said the dominant influence lately has been the sour economy.

“We know that a bad economy causes stress on families and that stress can lead to neglect or mistreatment of children. I hope the upward trend of abuse is short lived, but I also know we must be ready to meet our responsibility to protect kids and help strengthen fragile families,” he said.

DHS social work investigators conducted 25,814 assessments for child abuse or neglect in calendar 2009, up 11 percent from the year before. An assessment is launched when a complaint meets the legal threshold for sending an investigator.

As usual, about two-thirds of the investigations in 2009 showed that no abuse had occurred.

There were 8,867 abuse findings. Of those, 7,011 were “founded” abuses and another 1,840 were “confirmed” abuses, which are minor and isolated cases of maltreatment with the perpetrator not listed on the child abuse registry.

The 7,011 founded abuses were up sharply from 6,141 in 2008, but the number was comparable to those in 2007 and much lower than 7,941 founded abuses in 2006.

Some cases of abuse involve more than one child.

Last year, 10,148 children were involved in founded abuses. That compares to 8,779 in 2008, 10,358 in 2007, and 11,263 in 2006. There are about 730,000 children in Iowa.

The DHS statistics for calendar 2009 also show:

- The vast majority of abuses – 81 percent – are “denial of critical care,” better known as neglect. Many of these cases involve parents or other caretakers whose judgment is impaired by drug use or mental incapacity. In 2008 this category accounted for 79 percent of abuses.
- 9.3 percent of abuses were physical, compared to 10.8 percent the year before.
- The percent of abuses that were sexual (3.8 percent) or “presence of illegal drugs in the body” (3.8 percent) remained about the same as in 2008.
- About 52 percent of abused children were aged 5 or younger, again similar to recent years.

Krogmeier said that despite increased caseloads, DHS performance has been strong in preventing re-abuse. In data reported for the quarter ending Dec. 31, nearly 92 percent of abused or neglected children remained abuse-free in the following six months.

“More and more, we’re getting feedback that the DHS is there to help, not to punish. Obviously our top goal is safety, but we’re also keenly interested in preserving families and making them stronger, and I think that message is starting to get through,” Krogmeier said.

Krogmeier said that despite progress in keeping Iowa children safe, familiar and stubborn obstacles remain. “Domestic violence and substance abuse continue to be the main risk factors for children in Iowa,” he said.

#

Editors:

See a one-page summary showing numbers, trends, and budgets for various parts of the state’s child welfare system at <http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/docs/childwelfarebynumbers2009.pdf>

See a spreadsheet showing state and county-by-county abuse totals, types of abuses, and abuses by age group at <http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/Partners/Reports/PeriodicReports/Abuse/Child.html>
There are comparable spreadsheets for each of the past six years.